

CHAPTER 1 - PURPOSE AND NEED

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The Pocatello Field Office of the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received an amendment to the Plan of Operations from Nu-West Industries, Inc., doing business as Agrium Conda Phosphate Operations (Agrium) in December 2000 (and supplemented in November 2001). This amendment, known as the North Rasmussen Ridge Supplemental Mine and Reclamation Plan (Proposed Action), proposed activities that would support continued operation and expansion of open-pit phosphate mining at the Rasmussen Ridge Project. The project is located on public lands 19 miles northeast of Soda Springs in Caribou County, Idaho (**Figure 1.1-1**). Since proposed mining operations in North Rasmussen Ridge would be located on federal and state mineral leases administered by BLM and the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), both agencies require review and approval of Agrium's amended Plan of Operations. The mine area is also located on public lands within the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS), such that reclamation of disturbed lands would be required. Based on the potential for the Proposed Action to result in significant environmental impacts, BLM determined that an environmental impact statement (EIS) would be necessary, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

The BLM is serving as lead agency in preparing this EIS for the proposed continued operation and expansion of Agrium's existing phosphate mining operation. USFS and IDL are cooperating agencies in preparing this EIS. This document follows regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), BLM's NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1), and the USFS Handbook of Environmental Policy and Procedures (H-1909.15).

1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to recover phosphate ore reserves contained within the North Rasmussen Ridge leases and to transport it by present and future haul roads to the Agrium Conda Phosphate Operations Plant in Soda Springs via an existing railroad spur. The Proposed Action is needed to continue economically viable development of the phosphate resources within the federal and state mineral leases to supply phosphate ore to Agrium's fertilizer plant. The plant produces phosphate-based fertilizer and purified phosphoric acid to help meet demands in the United States.

As required by NEPA, this EIS describes the components of, reasonable alternatives to, and environmental consequences of continued operation and expansion of mining and processing facilities at North Rasmussen Ridge. **Chapter 1** describes Purpose and Need for the project, the role of BLM and other regulatory agencies, summarizes public participation in the EIS process, and identifies those issues that will be addressed in this document. **Chapter 2** provides a complete description of the existing operations and the Proposed Action and alternatives. **Chapter 3** describes the existing environment in the North Rasmussen Ridge area. Direct and indirect impacts associated with the Proposed Action and alternatives, and possible mitigation measures are described in **Chapter 4**. **Chapter 5** describes potential cumulative impacts associated with the project and other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. Consultation and coordination with federal, state, and local agencies and a list of preparers is included in **Chapter 6**. **Chapter 7** contains a list of references cited in developing the EIS, as well as a glossary and a document index.

Figure 1.1-1 General Location Map

1.2 AUTHORIZING ACTIONS

The BLM Pocatello Field Office Manager, who is the responsible official for the EIS and on-lease lands, will make a decision on land use authorizations for this proposal. This manager will consider the following: scoping comments and responses; anticipated environmental consequences discussed in the EIS; and applicable laws, regulations, and policies. The Caribou-Targhee National Forest Supervisor, who is the responsible official for Caribou-Targhee National Forest lands, will make recommendations to the BLM on selection of the preferred alternative and site-specific conditions of approval. The BLM will prepare and sign the Record of Decision (ROD).

The existing and proposed mining operations must comply with all laws and regulations for mining on public lands. A summary of these regulations is included in **Appendix A**. In addition to the BLM, USFS, and IDL, other federal, state and local agencies have jurisdiction over certain aspects of the Proposed Action. **Table 1.2-1** lists the agencies and identifies their authorizing responsibilities.

TABLE 1.2-1
MAJOR PERMITS, APPROVALS, AND CONSULTATIONS POTENTIALLY
REQUIRED FOR NORTH RASMUSSEN RIDGE

Issuing Agency/Permit or Approval Name	Nature of Permit Action	Applicable Project Component	Status of Permit or Approval Action
BLM			
Record of Decision	Compliance with National Environmental Policy Act	Activities affecting federal lands and resources	Required for final approval
Mine and Reclamation Plan	Compliance with 43 CFR 3590.2a, 3592.1a	Activities affecting federal leased mineral resources	Pending after Record of Decision on the final EIS
Two lease modifications	Surface disturbance on USFS-managed lands	Disturbance of USFS land off lease.	Lease modification required
Water Management Plan	Compliance with no undue degradation surface management regulations	Activities affecting federal lands and activities.	Required for final approval
FOREST SERVICE			
Consultation and Recommendation.	No permit.	Activities affecting National Forest System lands.	Required for final approval.
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY			
National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit	Protects quality of surface waters from stormwater discharge under Clean Water Act	Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP)	Current permit may require modifications to SWPPP
Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasures (SPCC) Plan	Provides management direction for spills	Bulk petroleum products storage	Current plan may require changes
U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE			
Endangered Species Act compliance (Section 7)	Protects threatened and endangered species	Any activity, such as blasting or habitat disturbance, potentially affecting listed or proposed threatened and endangered species	Biological Assessment/Biological Evaluation (BA/BE) has been prepared; consultation is under way
Migratory Bird Treaty Act	Protects migratory birds	All surface disturbing activities	BA/BE is complete

TABLE 1.2-1 (CONT.) MAJOR PERMITS, APPROVALS, AND CONSULTATIONS POTENTIALLY REQUIRED FOR NORTH RASMUSSEN RIDGE			
Issuing Agency/Permit or Approval Name	Nature of Permit Action	Applicable Project Component	Status of Permit or Approval Action
Bald Eagle Protection Act	Protects bald and golden eagles	All surface disturbing activities	BA/BE is complete
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS			
Permit to discharge dredged or fill material (Clean Water Act [CWA], Section 404 Permit)	Authorized placement of fill or dredged material in waters of the U.S. or adjacent wetlands	No Name or Reese Canyon Creek drainages	Application will be filed to seek approval before construction
BUREAU OF ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, & FIREARMS			
High explosives permit	Possession of explosives	Blasting in open pits	No additional approval required
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY			
Air quality permit	Release of air pollutants	Elements that contribute to air quality issues, such as blasting or hauling emissions	Required air approvals for property already in hand
Resource Conservation and Recovery Act program (adopted federal standards)	Management of hazardous waste	Storage and off-site disposal of hazardous wastes	Exempt small quantity generator notification already completed
Board of Health & Welfare	Governs quality and safety of drinking water	Culinary water supply	No additional approval required
Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan	Compliance with Non-degradation Water Quality Standards	Stormwater discharges from facilities	Plan approval required for operations
Certification of Water Quality (CWA, Section 401)	Protects quality of navigable waters from discharges	Construction activities discharges from disturbed areas	Permit application to be filed prior to any construction
Groundwater Quality Rules	Protects quality of groundwater from contaminants	Potential infiltration of leachate products into groundwater	Demonstration of no degradation of groundwater
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES			
Stream Channel Alteration Permit, CWA, Section 402 Permit	Protection of stream channels	Haul road crossings	Permit application for construction in No Name and Reese Canyon Creeks will be submitted
IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF LANDS			
Mine and Reclamation Plan Permit	Permit and bonding for reclamation	Mining and reclamation plans	Required for mining regulated by federal agencies
IDAHO STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE			
National Historic Preservation Act compliance Section 106	Protects cultural and historical resources	All ground disturbing activities	As required
CARIBOU COUNTY			
Conditional Use Permit	Approval of facilities within an approved land use	General facilities	No additional permit required

A reclamation performance bond will be required for the North Rasmussen Ridge Mine. The bond calculation is based on the selected alternative as identified in the Final EIS and ROD. Agrium will post bonds for both BLM and IDL leases to ensure compliance with reclamation requirements. The

calculation will be based on acres of disturbance as established by the Idaho Land Board and adjusted as needed when mine disturbance areas increase. The bond will also be based on actual costs of reclamation. Bonds are required to be submitted and approved prior to any land disturbance activities. The amount of the North Rasmussen Ridge bond could range from \$2.4 to \$4.2 million depending on the selected alternative.

1.3 RELATIONSHIP TO BLM AND NON-BLM POLICIES, PLANS, AND PROGRAMS

The Proposed Action has been reviewed for compliance with agency policies, plans, and programs. The proposal conforms to decisions on minerals in the Record of Decision, Pocatello Resource Area, Resource Management Plan (BLM 1987), approved in 1988. USFS has also concluded that the proposed mining of North Rasmussen Ridge can be implemented in compliance with the Caribou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) (USFS 1985). Page III-2 of the LRMP includes the statement, “Non-renewable resource development will override renewable resource development as a featured resource use.” On page III-20, it says, “Mineral resources of the Forest that can be produced at a profit, after consideration of the costs of mitigating measures necessary to protect surface resource values will be produced to meet demands.” USFS has recently released a draft revised forest plan (USFS 2001) for the Caribou portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. It uses an adaptive approach to reclamation measures, and incorporates Best Management Practices (BMPs) for selenium. The Proposed Action complies with the revised Forest Plan, which includes the following description of the desired future condition for reclamation of mined or drastically disturbed lands: “Drastically disturbed sites are reclaimed emphasizing: 1) suitable topsoil preservation; 2) use of native plant species; and 3) stable topographic relief that visually conforms to natural surroundings.”

The approach for active phosphate leases in the revised forest plan is to incorporate BMPs into the conditions of approval for site-specific mining and reclamation plans. It also allows for developments in research and technology over time to be incorporated into the prescribed practices and monitoring systems.

1.4 ISSUES

To allow an early and open process for establishing the scope of significant issues related to the Proposed Action (40 CFR 1510.7), a public scoping period was provided by BLM. A Notice of Intent to prepare the EIS was published in the Federal Register on May 18, 2001. Publication of this notice in the Federal Register initiated a 30-day public scoping period for the Proposed Action that provided for acceptance of written comments. Details of scoping are presented in **Chapter 6** of this EIS.

The major issues that were identified by the scoping effort concerned water resources, wildlife, reclamation and restoration, and cumulative impacts. Of major concern was the potential for impacts to the quantity and quality of groundwater and surface water. Specifically, concern focused on whether water entering the backfilled pits could leach any contaminants into the groundwater. Potential effects on wildlife in the area were a major issue, including terrestrial and aquatic wildlife

and the potential for habitat fragmentation and effects on threatened and endangered species. Development of the kinds of alternatives that should be addressed, including total backfill, use of impermeable caps over waste rock, and avoidance of any waste rock dumps outside the pits was conducted by the agencies and was driven by the issues and public comments. The need to address cumulative impacts was emphasized and must include industries and activities other than phosphate mining.

Public comments and agency direction concerning the scope of the EIS are grouped according to issues and summarized in **Table 1.4-1**. This table also provides references to the sections of this EIS that respond to each issue raised in the comments.

**TABLE 1.4-1
ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN SCOPING**

Issue	EIS Document Section(s)
Water Resources	
The potential effects of water entering the backfill to leach selenium and other contaminants into the groundwater.	Chapters 3 and 4 Geology and Water Resources
The potential effects of trace elements in the waste rock to contaminate soil and surface water resources.	Chapter 4 Water Resources
The potential effects of project roads to degrade surface and groundwater quality.	Chapters 3 and 4 Water Resources and Land Use
The potential effects of the partially backfilled pit to form a lake and associated effects.	Chapter 4 Water Resources
The potential effects of pollutants in runoff from the project on the Blackfoot River watershed.	Chapter 4 Water Resources
Wildlife, Vegetation and Fisheries	
The potential effects of habitat fragmentation and loss on species biodiversity.	Chapter 4 Vegetation and Terrestrial Wildlife
The potential effects of habitat loss on wildlife populations, both resident and migratory, and including threatened or endangered species.	Chapters 3 and 4 Terrestrial Wildlife and Threatened, Endangered and Special Status Species
The potential effects of water quality changes on fish populations and their habitat.	Chapters 3 and 4 Fisheries and Aquatic Resources
Wetlands	
The potential effects of water quantity changes on loss or degradation of wetlands and riparian areas.	Chapters 3 and 4 Vegetation, Riparian Areas and Wetlands
Soils	
The potential effects of soil handling on reclamation potential.	Chapters 3 and 4 Soils and Watershed
Grazing Management	
The potential effects of mine disturbance on grazing allotments.	Chapters 3 and 4 Grazing Management
Air Quality	
The potential effects of mining emissions on ambient air quality.	Chapters 3 and 4 Air Resources
Socio-Economic Conditions	
The potential effects of mine expansion on the regional economy.	Chapters 3 and 4 Social and Economic Resources

TABLE 1.4-1 (CONT.) ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN SCOPING	
Issue	EIS Document Section(s)
Hazardous and Solid Wastes	
The potential effects of mining activities contributing to hazardous materials entering the environment.	Chapters 2 and 4 Description of Proposed Action and Hazardous Materials
Reclamation/Restoration	
The potential effects of mine disturbance on reclamation, closure, and restoration success.	Chapter 2 Description of Proposed Action
The potential effects of a complete or total backfill alternative on the area environment.	Chapter 2 Project Alternatives
The potential effects of a no-backfill alternative on the area environment.	Chapter 2 Project Alternatives
The potential procedures and calculations for a reclamation bond.	Chapter 1 Authorizing Actions
Cumulative Effects	
The potential cumulative effects of phosphate mining and other land use activities on the area environment.	Chapter 5 Cumulative Impacts